DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 059 014 RE 003 977

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TITLE	Reading Programs: What Is a Good Reading Program? Number 6.
INSTITUTION	National Reading Center Foundation, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	71
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	National Reading Center, 1776 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036 (free)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Developmental Reading; *Objectives; *Parent Role; *Personnel; *Program Evaluation; Reading Diagnosis; *Reading Programs

ABSTRACT

Some of the components of a good reading program are described so that parents can have a basis for judging the status of the reading program in their own child's school. The components identified are (1) a knowledgeable, enthusiastic administrator who understands the components of a good program and is sensitive to student and teacher needs; (2) a highly trained reading supervisor, reading specialists, and competent classroom teachers and librarians; (3) a continuous reading development program with specific goals and cooperative planning; (4) adequate diagnosis providing thorough records of the children; (5) an attractive, well-equipped library/media center supervised by a qualified and imaginative materials specialist; and (6) a wide and exciting variety of books, instructional materials, and equipment. Finally, the brochure explains the role of parents in supporting the reading program and their responsibilities in helping their child learn to read. This brochure is one of a series commissioned by the National Reading Center to help inform all citizens about reading issues and to promote national functional literacy. (AW)

ED 059014
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NATIONAL READING CENTER

READING PROGRAMS

RE 003 977

National Reading Center
1776 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

WHAT IS A GOOD READING PROGRAM?

by Norma Rogers and James L. Laffey
(Indiana University)

All parents want their schools to provide good instruction in reading. As a parent, what should you look for or ask about in looking at reading instruction in your child's school?

This brochure has been prepared to explain some of the components of a good reading program so that parents can have a basis for judging the status of the reading program in their own child's school.

A COMPLEX SUBJECT

To begin with, it is important to realize that learning to read means learning a complex set of skills. A variety of elements are involved in a good reading program. When any one factor is examined, you should bear in mind that it is only one aspect of a complex subject.

If each child is to learn to read with confidence and with a growing sense of power to think, to grasp the thoughts of others, and to express his own, these elements are needed.

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

A knowledgeable, enthusiastic principal can be the crucial factor in a good elementary school reading program. The school administrator, who understands the components of a good program and is sensitive to the needs of his students and teachers, will provide the leadership to create excellent reading instruction and resources. He will seek well qualified personnel: a reading supervisor or consultant to head the program, and specially trained reading teachers. He will insist on in-service teacher education in reading, since the average classroom teacher may have had only a few hours of college preparation to teach reading. When a new program is initiated, when funds

are needed, when new materials and equipment must be purchased, or special teacher training sessions are needed, he demonstrates his commitment by presenting a strong case to the school board, and if necessary, to the community, for budgetary support.

READING PERSONNEL

A highly trained reading supervisor, reading specialists and competent classroom teachers are necessary to carry out a good reading program.

The reading supervisor is primarily responsible for organizing and guiding the entire program of reading instruction. This includes formulating goals and objectives, developing on-the-job in-service training or workshops for classroom teachers, assisting teachers individually, and informing staff members of new research findings. The supervisor also selects reading textbooks and other learning materials and equipment. He demonstrates new methods, tests disabled readers and prescribes, when needed, a program of remedial instruction to help the child overcome his particular reading problems. The supervisor works closely with the central administration, with principals, other subject supervisors, teachers and parents to bring about good understanding and team effort.

Trained, dedicated, innovative teachers are a must if the objectives of the reading program are to be realized for every child. They will understand how children learn, the several skills that go into reading, and various methods of helping children to learn those skills. Teachers who enjoy reading themselves have a great advantage, and their example can encourage children to learn to read.

The classroom teacher needs a specially trained reading teacher to whom she can turn for assistance in diagnosing reading problems and finding techniques for those children who, for any one of many reasons, are not learning to read successfully.

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Schools that do not have reading specialists often have poorly organized reading programs with ill-defined goals and sketchily worked-out kinds of evaluation of children and their progress. Without specialists, useful materials, methods and equipment may go unused or be misused. Research results are less likely to be known or used.

School librarians are essential members of the well-organized reading development team. Working closely with reading specialists, classroom teachers and children, they can help to identify children's interests, reinforce or motivate the desire to read, and feed the reading habit as it grows with books and other related materials.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

A good kindergarten through 12th grade reading development program, in which the skills of one level are built upon the skills of previous levels, has specific goals and is planned cooperatively. Here are a few such goals:

1. Readiness for reading, developed through all kinds of experiences.
2. Motivating reading by stimulating interests, curiosity and by broadening concepts.
3. Achievement of skill in word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension and speed.
4. Broadened experiences, ability to think and to relate ideas through reading.
5. Development of taste, judgement and appreciation of style, literary allusion, figures of speech.
6. Ability to evaluate ideas and to apply criteria sharpened by reading to other media of communication such as films and TV.
7. Attainment of pleasure, perspective, personal and social adjustment, positive self-image and understanding of others through reading.

Each child must be taught at his instructional level at least some of the time each day. Volunteer reading tutors or paraprofessionals can help provide daily individualized attention for each child. A well-balanced program will extend the teaching of reading through the junior high and high school, where content-related study skills and vocabulary will be taught mainly by subject matter teachers, with reading specialists ready to assist students who have additional needs.

READING DIAGNOSIS

Adequate diagnosis is the blueprint for meeting each student's needs. Individual and group diagnostic tests and staff observation provide this information. Records should be passed along to each child's subsequent teacher and supporting staff, so that a continuing program of reading instruction can be designed to meet the particular needs of both gifted and disabled readers.

A well planned reading program requires a wide and exciting variety of books, instructional materials and equipment.

Schools should have several different basal texts for reading instruction from which teachers may choose. They should vary in reading level, content, skill approaches and interests in order to meet the needs of different children. Supplementary materials such as workbooks, flashcards, programmed materials, instructional kits, non-text books, pictures and games should also be available in each classroom, as well as reference books, dictionaries and story books written for various reading skills and interest levels. Into the classroom, in addition, can come a constant refreshing flow of materials from the school's library/media center to spark new interests and keep abreast of developing skills.

LEARNING CENTER

A first-rate school reading program requires an attractive, well-equipped library/media center supervised by a qualified and imaginative materials specialist. She facilitates the use of all the library's resources for teachers, individual children and groups, throughout the school day and after school as well. Between the classroom and the library/media center, children can be surrounded all day by things to read, look at and wonder about. They should also be encouraged to take books and other materials home to share in an out-of-school setting with family and friends.

Besides books, the library/media center has an array of records, films, filmstrips, tapes, transparencies, maps, learning games, pictures, globes, models and other fascinating materials, all organized so that they can be found and easily used. The center supplements the resources of each classroom. The teacher and the reading specialists draw upon the librarian's help to stimulate interests, observe children's problems and successes in reading, and to provide just the right combination of materials to meet the changing needs of each child as his skills and interests grow.

PARENTS

Parents play an important role in an effective reading program. Once parents become familiar with the school's reading program, they can find ways to support their child's efforts to learn to read. They encourage the child's progress without pressuring him. They read themselves and talk about what they read. They provide a quiet place for the child to read at home, and special times for family reading out loud. They follow up trips, TV shows and other experiences with reading. They attend parent meetings and parent-teacher conferences, encourage the school to provide adequate library resources, and support the hiring of special reading teachers and library staff.

This publication is one of a series commissioned by the National Reading Center to help inform all citizens about reading issues and to promote national functional literacy. The National Reading Center is supported by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education.

GPO 838-804

ED 059014